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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Four Schools Selected to Represent Vermont at Regional Conference on Educational Innovation

The Schools Will Share Successful Strategies with Colleagues Across from New England

Montpelier – Four Vermont schools - Big Picture South Burlington, Cabot School, Mt. Abraham Union Middle/High School, and Vergennes Union High School - have been invited to represent their state at a regional conference on effective strategies for improving teaching and learning in the 21st century.

The conference, **High School Redesign in Action** (newenglandssc.org), will take place March 20–21, 2014, in Norwood, Massachusetts. It is sponsored by the New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC), a state-led regional partnership committed to high school innovation. All the selected schools have made significant progress raising student achievement, graduation rates, college-enrollment numbers, or other indicators of educational success.

“The Agency and our schools share a commitment to making sure all our students develop the capabilities they need to thrive in college or in the careers to which they aspire,” said Vermont Secretary of Education Rebecca Holcombe. “We know that our students need to walk different paths to reach these shared goals. Our schools are working hard to personalize learning and build on each student’s individual passions and strengths, so that our students find school relevant, meaningful, and challenging in all the best ways.”

In collaboration with the Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island Departments of Education, and the Vermont Agency of Education, the presenting schools were selected not only for their exemplary work, but also for their extraordinary commitment to making sure every student has a chance to succeed, to live a fulfilled and meaningful life, and to make a positive contribution to the world in which they live. All four of the honored schools are members of the Consortium’s League of Innovative Schools (lis.newenglandssc.org), a multistate network of secondary schools working together to improve their programs and performance. The League’s goal is to promote the exchange of best practices and innovative improvement strategies throughout the region.

The NESSC is a regional partnership working to advance forward-thinking innovations in secondary education that will empower the next generation of citizens, workers, and leaders. The Consortium’s goal is to ensure that every public high school student receives an education that prepares them for success in the colleges, careers, and communities of the 21st century. The Consortium is funded by the Nellie Mae Education Foundation (nmeffoundation.org), the largest philanthropy in New England focused exclusively on education, and it is coordinated by the Great Schools Partnership (greatschoolspartnership.org), a nonprofit educational-support organization in Portland, Maine.

VERMONT’S HIGH SCHOOL REDESIGN IN ACTION PRESENTATIONS

CAN YOU SHOW WHAT YOU KNOW? ONE SCHOOL’S APPROACH TO PROFICIENCY-BASED LEARNING

Schools: Big Picture South Burlington High School, South Burlington, Vermont

Presenters: Ella Downey (student), Anna Finklestein (advisor), Amelia Payne (student), Shelby Resposa (student), Jim Shields (advisor)

Presentation Information: Thursday, March 20 | 3:45 pm + Friday, March 21 | 1:15 pm

Website: <http://bigpicturesb.net/>

Contact: Jim Shields | jshields@bigpicturesb.net

Description: Many schools are replacing the Carnegie unit and high-stakes assessments with proficiency-based approaches that provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in more authentic and personally meaningful ways. Yet proficiency-based learning brings its own set of challenges for schools. In this workshop, participants will learn how proficiency-based learning is practiced in a personalized, experiential-learning school-within-a-school. Presenters will share their process for transitioning to proficiency-based learning and show how they document and communicate

student achievement on reports and transcripts. Students will share their experiences, including examples of projects they have undertaken to meet expected proficiencies. Participants will also leave with concrete action steps they can take to explore or implement proficiency-based learning in their own schools.

A MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR: ARTS-INFUSED, PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

School: Cabot School, Cabot, VT

Presenters: Brian Boyes (teacher, project-based learning coach), Heidi Cookson (student), Cassandra Morse (student), Timothy Mueller-Harder (student), Dave Schilling (teacher), Gage Sironi (student)

Presentation Information: Friday, March 21 | 9:15 am + 10:45 am

Website: <http://www.cabotschool.org/>

Contact: Brian Boyes | bboyes@cabotschool.org

Description: Cabot School's high-school band has transformed into a professional soul-funk-rock band. Calling themselves The Limes, the group cut an album at a well-known recording studio and will be going on an East Coast tour later this spring. From management and booking to songwriting and technology, The Limes have taken on all of the responsibilities necessary to independently manage their band and enter the professional music world. This workshop will feature performances by the band and student presentations on how Cabot's project-based-learning environment helped them learn how to problem solve, promote themselves, and navigate the music business. Music teacher Brian Boyes will also share two related projects in which band students produced music-documentary programs for a local radio station that highlighted the social and cultural aspects of their repertoire. Participants will get a glimpse into the school's curriculum-mapping process and tips on how to meaningfully infuse the arts into a project-based teaching and learning environment.

SEAMLESS COEXISTENCE: INTEGRATING COURSEWORK AND PERSONALIZED LEARNING

School: Mount Abraham Union Middle/High School, Bristol, VT

Presenters: Russell Comstock (personalized learning advisor), Gerrie Heuts (personalized learning advisor), Josie Jordan (personalized learning advisor), Andy Kepes (principal), Robin Kuhns (student), Brian Wendel (student)

Presentation Information: Friday, March 21 | 10:45 am + 1:15 pm

Website: <http://mtabe.k12.vt.us/>

Contact: Andy Kepes | akepes@anesu.org

Description: Mount Abraham has spent the last five years developing a personalized-pathways program that is based on the Big Picture model—but with one significant difference: the great majority of the students who take part in the pathways program also take other courses at the school. While our hybrid model has allowed many more students to take advantage of personalized learning at Mount Abraham, it also created a variety of dilemmas that school leaders have had to address. In this workshop, the presenters will describe the continuum of personalized-learning opportunities offered by the school, and engage participants in a frank and honest discussion of the school's struggles with a blended model of student learning. Participants will have a chance to hear from and ask questions to staff and students, and they will leave the workshop with a stronger understanding of personalized learning, as well as the challenges and conflicts that may arise and will need to be overcome.

FROM HYPOTHESIS TO PRACTICE: THE MESSINESS OF SCHOOL-WIDE TRANSFORMATION

School: Vergennes Union High School, Vergennes, VT

Presenters: Matthew DeBlois (teacher), Brianna Gebo (student), Kristine Kirkaldy (teacher), Natalie Salley (student)

Presentation Information: Thursday, March 20 | 2:15 pm + 3:45 pm

Website: <http://vuhs.org/>

Contact: Matthew DeBlois | mdeblois@anwsu.org

Description: As the classes of 2016 and 2017 begin their high school careers at Vergennes Union, the school's transition to personalized, performance-based learning continues. Balancing the hopes and dreams of students and staff, the school has embraced rigor, relevance, and relationships, while also offering students voice and choice as they work to acquire vital 21st-century skills. In this presentation, students and teachers will share their recent adventures on their journey toward Performance-Based Graduation Requirements (PBGRs), including, from both the students' and the teachers' points of view, topics such as e-portfolio-based evaluation, yearlong projects, and integrated systems of support. In addition to hearing from all learners involved (teachers and students), participants can come away with tools and templates for enhancing the three "Rs" in their school.

Currently, sixteen Vermont schools have been inducted into the League of Innovative Schools. Learn more here: <http://education.vermont.gov/nessc>.

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